

U.S. Congressman Mike Pence wrote the following op-ed commemorating the tragic events of September 11, 2001:

9-11: From a Day of Tragedy to a Triumph of Freedom

BY MIKE PENCE

Like every American, I will never forget where I was on the morning of September 11, 2001. As a Member of Congress from Indiana, that day my duties took me to Capitol Hill and to sights and sounds I will never forget.

I witnessed the U.S. Capitol literally hemorrhaging with people running in every direction. I heard the deafening sounds of sirens all around and thunderous booms of military aircraft going supersonic at low altitude. And I saw the columns of mud-brown smoke billowing out of the Pentagon just across the Potomac River.

As the world watched the towers fall in New York City, I witnessed the aftermath of the first attack on our nation's capital since the War of 1812. It was a day when evil triumphed over good and the cunning plans of the enemies of freedom had their moment. They thought they had unleashed violence sufficient to cow a great nation but they were wrong.

What our enemies intended for harm gave birth to a season of national unity and a new generation of heroes. The unity and call to service appeared almost instantly.

At a time of great national division, it is hard to imagine today what Washington D.C. was like in the hours, weeks and months following September 11th, but the unity of that day did happen. I was there. I saw it.

In the swirl of events that morning, I knew that Congress would need to convene to provide the authority and resources for our national response. As Capitol Hill police officers urged me to leave the grounds, I asked where I could report for duty and was escorted to the office of the Chief of the Capitol Police where the combined leadership of the House and the Senate in both parties was huddled watching the events unfold on several television screens.

When I arrived in the room, the congressional leaders were standing apart, divided by party and by institutions, but as that fateful morning wore on, things changed. Faced with a merciless attack on our nation, the politics of the room dissolved. There were no Republicans in that room, there were no Democrats in that room, just Americans.

I watched as leaders set aside every divisive issue before the Congress and made plans to move resources and programs designed to meet the moment with bipartisan resolve. And that unity would animate the work of the Congress for months following the attack.

But the true legacy of 9-11 cannot be found among political leaders of the day, but in the citizen soldiers and public safety personnel who answered that day with courage and selflessness.

To the soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines who answered that day with resolve, who did what needed to be done without regard to their own safety, we owe our deepest gratitude. I have prayed with the families and wept at the funerals of Hoosiers who did not shrink from 9-11 but grew into heroes whose names will forever be engraved in the heart of a grateful nation. To our police, fire and public safety personnel who ran in when others ran out, who braved the flames, who followed the leads and who took such actions as were necessary to bring us a decade free of another terrorist event on American soil belongs the credit for this day. This anniversary belongs to the fallen, their families and to all those whose diligence and tenacity brought safety to our families and justice to our enemies.

A common enemy forged common ground and a new generation of American heroes. Today, we rightly pause to remember those who fell on 9-11 and every day since in the War on Terror. But we also pause to celebrate those Americans who, by their service and sacrifice, have made this day of tragedy into a triumph of freedom.

